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THE CASE FOR QUEER SUMMER CAMP

HOW A WEEK
OF SUN, FUN
AND JOYFUL
AFFIRMATION CAN
TRANSFORM LIVES
BY JAMES PADRAIG DALY



'I AM PRIDE'

Tituss Burgess on Being a Part of
DSO's First Official Pride Show

LEADERS UNITE FOR PRIDE

Inside the Governor's Mansion
for Whitmer's Pride Celebration

MICHIGAN'S NEXT PRIDE SYMBOL?

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Campers take to the lake at Camp Unirondack, an LGBTQ-affirming summer camp in upstate New York. Photo: Shannon Konek



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Another successful Michigan Pride season is in the books! Once again, communities across the state have pulled together to plan events ranging from sprawling big city fests to gatherings in rural communities that don't always feel welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community — this year, our calendar included nearly 50 events (with several yet to come in July and beyond). There's plenty to do beyond Pride, too. Don't miss Tituss Burgess as he performs with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra or your chance to enjoy a fun, queer-affirming outdoor event camping with The Queer Outdoors. Closer to home, make a night of it at an upcoming North Star Lounge LGBTQ+ event.



Tituss Burgess. Photo: Detroit Symphony Orchestra

See Tituss Burgess Perform with the DSO

Acclaimed Broadway and TV actor Tituss Burgess will bring his larger-than-life voice to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra June 29 for a fabulous evening of song in celebration of Pride. Reserve your tickets now for a show featuring song selections from Broadway and film with accompaniment from the DSO conducted by Principal Pops Conductor Designate Enrico Lopez-Yañez. The event marks the first time the DSO has officially recognized LGBTQ+ Pride, a tradition the symphony intends to continue. Don't miss our Q&A with Burgess on page 20!

June 29, 8 p.m., Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall (3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Tickets are available now at tickets.dso.org/syos/performance/10306.



Go Camping with The Queer Outdoors

Sign ups are open through June 28 for The Queer Outdoors annual camping adventure, set for July 26-28 at Bay City State Park on the shores of the Saginaw Bay. Campers will enjoy a large sandy beach, 2,000 acres of wetland woods and one of the largest remaining freshwater, coastal wetlands on the Great Lakes, the Tobico Marsh. The organization holds queer-affirming outdoor adventure and meetup events throughout the year for all skill levels, including the Queer Workday Honeysuckle Happy Hour volunteer cleanup event on June 27 and a hike through Saginaw Forest with Ann Arbor Employee Pride on June 30.

- Camping along Saginaw Bay: July 26-28, sign up at bit.ly/3KStHA8 by June 28.
- Honeysuckle Happy Hour (volunteer forest clean-up event): June 27, 4:30-8 p.m., Rouge Park North Prairie Trail Entrance, sign up at bit.ly/4cLeyMX
- Saginaw Forest Hike: June 30, 1-3 p.m., Ann Arbor Community Center (648 S. Wagner Road), sign up at bit.ly/3xpEA9d.



2023 Fern Fest. Photo: MichiganFernFest.com

Get Set for Fern Fest 2024

Picking up where the 40-year-old Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (aka Michfest) left off when the annual festival ended in 2015, Fern Fest will return for its third annual gathering on July 9-14. The six-day women's music festival has expanded rapidly since its inaugural event in 2022, prompting a move to a new, larger space at Smiling Acres in Trufant Michigan, north of Grand Rapids. The new space will offer more room to move and an upgraded sound system to showcase artists like Alisabeth Von Presley and Angel Davenport. Fern Fest producer Abra Wise told BTL earlier this year that Fern Fest is designed as a "time of connection and healing for women, non-binary and trans folks as they spend a week listening to music in the woods, off the grid and disconnected from everyday life."

July 9-14, Smiling Acres (3060 N. Johnson Road, Trufant). Find tickets and more info at michiganfernfest.com.



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Fun at North Star Lounge. Photo: Facebook / @northstarloungea2

Hit Up North Star Lounge for LGBTQ+ Night

Pride Month is drawing to a close, but every Thursday is Pride Night at North Star Lounge. Don't miss events like Queer Bingo, upcoming performances by artists like folk singer-songwriter Meredith Hinz (June 27), eclectic musician Mothy (July 11) and indie folk duo Just Homesick (July 18), trivia with Terry McClymonds (who served as the resident trivia master at \aut\ bar for nine years) and queer open mics where community members share music, poetry and unique talents. Find the full list at nstarlounge.com/events.

Thursdays, 5:30-9:30 p.m., North Star Lounge (301 N. Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor).



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Upcoming Michigan Pride Fests

The last official weekend of Pride Month is packed with community events all over the Great Lakes State.

Saturday, June 29

- East Lansing Pride. Albert El Fresco (Albert Ave. between Grove St. and M.A.C.), 5-9 p.m.
- Flint Pride. Riverbank Park, 2-8 p.m.
- Holland Pride. Centennial Park, 12-5 p.m.
- Jackson Pride. Horace Blackman Park, 12-6 p.m.
- Monroe County Pride. 111 W. Elm Ave., 12-6 p.m.
- South Haven. Stanley Johnston Park, 12-10 p.m. First Pride event!
- Three Rivers. Downtown Three Rivers, 12-11 p.m.
- Warren. Warren City Hall, 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Sunday, June 30

- Big Rapids. Downtown Big Rapids, 12-8 p.m.
- Buchanan. Downtown Buchanan, 4-9 p.m.
- Port Huron (Blue Water Pride), 701 McMorran Blvd., 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Flint Pride 2023.
Photo: Facebook / @FlintGayPride

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THE CASE FOR QUEER SUMMER CAMPS

How a week of joyful affirmation in a place where kids can just be themselves is life-changing



A group of campers at Camp Unirondack. Photo: Elizabeth Bashur

BY JAMES PADRAIG DALY

In the summer of 2015, I worked as a camp counselor in northern Michigan. It was one of the most enriching summers of my life.

Despite the overriding positive memories, when I reflect on that summer, I remain troubled by the gender divisions and enforced heteronormativity I observed daily at camp. Almost everything at camp was divided by gender binary, from meal times to evening

activities. I led a cabin of teenage boys, many of whom reminded me of myself at that age; they had a propensity for pop music, reality TV and musical theater, and didn't quite fit in with the other boys. I saw teenagers mocked and excluded for displaying flamboyant behavior amidst an underlying enforcement of what boys and girls should do and be like. Now, a generation on, I'm not confident that we have arrived at a place where queer teenagers

can be completely comfortable in camp environments. But there are sure signs of hope.

Anyone who has lived the camp experience, be it over 10 years as a camper, or 10 weeks as a counselor, knows how special it is, and how it stays with you forever. Whether it's the first place you feel independent, learn a skill that shapes your purpose or where you made friends for life, camp has unbounded potential to inform who we are. This is why it's so

important that campers are free to be who they are at camp.

Summer camp purports to be an open, free, relaxed time and, for the most part, it is. It can also be an environment sometimes rife with microaggressions for anyone who feels or is made to feel different. Though many queer adults, myself included, can cling to these instances of being ostracized as strengthening moments, they are inherently traumatic and shouldn't have a place at summer camp.

The summer I was a counselor, I became aware of a boy, let's call him Joey, who was best friends with all of the campers in my cabin and had been in their cabin for five years, but that year he had not been allowed to bunk with them. I later learned that the previous year, he and one of my campers had kissed. And his punishment was enforced ostracization away from his friends. I have often pondered what message that sent 13-year-old Joey. Instead of compassion and understanding around an innocent, curious queer experience, he was shown isolation and restriction.

There's a conservative view that openly queer spaces force a sexual narrative on young people. As a society, we need to separate notions of queerness from sex. Though sexual attraction is eventually a distinguishing factor in many people's queerness, a child knowing they're gay doesn't mean they want physical intimacy any more or less than their straight peers. And if the worst thing you can imagine is a teenage boy kissing another teenage boy, I have news for you: Sometimes that is what teenagers do at camp!

A foundation of all camps' values is a sense of community. But community can be an elusive thing for some people, namely queer youngsters who are on the journey of identifying that they are somehow different, but might not have the language or social

mechanisms yet to ease into predominantly heteronormative places. What if there were camps that could fast track a sense of this important community for these kids?

Enter Camp Unirondack in New York State. A camp that doesn't brand itself as expressly queer,

“It gave me a place where I could truly let go of everyone's standards and just fully be myself. ”

— feedback from a Camp4All camper

but is proud and intentional about radical acceptance. The approach is a judgment-free treatment of each camper as a worthwhile individual. When I watched their promotional video, I was moved when one of the attendees says that, at Unirondack, members of the LGBTQ+ community are not treated as if they are members of a community. They are treated like humans who aren't branded with any label. This is founded on a principle so basic that it now sounds radical: Treat everyone equally and with kindness, completely regardless of who they

See Queer Summer Camp, page 18



Gov. Whitmer hosted a Pride celebration at the Governor's Mansion on June 20. Photos: Chris Azzopardi



Inside the Governor's Mansion for Whitmer's Pride Celebration

The event marked the first time in Michigan history a drag queen was a featured guest and speaker

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

On June 20 in Lansing, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer hosted a momentous Pride celebration at the Governor's Mansion, bringing together legislators, activists and community leaders in a heartfelt display of support and solidarity for the LGBTQ+ community. Against the backdrop of recent legislative victories and ongoing challenges, including the precarious nature of the upcoming election, the event underscored both the progress made and the work that remains.

Addressing the gathering, Gov. Whitmer expressed her deep appreciation for Michigan legislators, Attorney General Dana Nessel, Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist and activists from local LGBTQ+ organizations whose efforts have shaped policies reflecting the diverse

queer voices across Michigan. She also touched on poignant milestones, including the signing of an amendment to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act that added protections against discrimination for LGBTQ+ Michiganders.

"I got on the desk in the office today and hung the Pride flag on the window of my Capitol office," Gov. Whitmer recounted, doing so knowing that only the flags of the United States of America and State of Michigan are authorized to be flown in accordance with United States code on the main Capitol flag pole, with a few exceptions (the Pride flag not being one of them). She humorously noted the swift response it garnered:

"How long did it take before we got a phone call about it?" "Two hours and four minutes," someone in the audience was quick to point out.

The event was not just a celebration but a call to action. Whitmer urged

attendees to remain vigilant in the face of potential setbacks, particularly with crucial elections looming. "This is not a campaign event," she clarified. "I just want to make sure that we're all celebrating Pride, focusing on the next thing that we are going to do here in Michigan together, but also thinking about how crucial the next five months are going to be. I know I don't want to see us move backward on LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights and contraception."

In her remarks, Gov. Whitmer acknowledged the hard-won victories of recent years while cautioning against complacency. "The work is never done," she emphasized, urging continued advocacy and support. "We're here because so many put their lives and blood and sweat into preserving [these rights]," she added, underscoring the collective responsibility to uphold and advance them. "So we can't let 'em down."

The celebration was marked by moments of levity and camaraderie, with Gov. Whitmer warmly recalling interactions with colleagues and supporters. "Let's have a toast to the LGBTQ+ community," she proposed, garnering applause.

In a symbolic show of solidarity with drag performers across the country who have been under attack by right-wing legislators, Gov. Whitmer invited well-known drag queen and regular Motor City Pride performer Sabin to the celebration, who introduced Nessel as a "friend." Sabin's appearance marked the first time in Michigan history that a drag queen was a featured guest and speaker at the Governor's Mansion.

"First of all, can we just all say that I, never in a million years, thought that I would get to serve under a governor who loved and embraced drag queens more than I do?" Nessel expressed, before adding earnest,

heartfelt remarks about current "ridiculous and false and tragically harmful narratives."

"This will just be something that continues on for generations to come, in part because of the hard work that so many of you in this room have done," she said. "And I especially want to thank our governor for obviously inviting us here today — the most fervent ally that I have ever seen in elected office for all of my years. So thank you so much, Governor Whitmer, for all of your incredible work and for supporting all of us. And again, for having drag queens in your home."

The event concluded with a sense of optimism and determination. "We're going to keep celebrating," Gov. Whitmer affirmed, "and I'm going to keep having drag queens at the house."

Meet Your Gaming Neighbor: Angela Washko Joins University of Michigan Arts Scene

The new Stamps prof on how she connects gaming with big issues like misogyny, feminism and motherhood

BY DANI LAMORTE

Somewhere, a track coach is barking something — maybe motivational, definitely deafening — into the ear of a college freshman. If she listens carefully, she might do something amazing. She might make video art.

"I went to undergrad on a sports scholarship for track and field," explains Angela Washko, Ann Arbor's newest artist neighbor. Sports took Washko from her small Pennsylvania town to Temple University's Tyler School of Art and Architecture. Unfortunately, the university's faculty saw Washko's "secret jock" life as a distraction rather than a source of inspiration.

"Once my professors knew that I was a competitive athlete, there was a lot of dismissal of the seriousness of my art," Washko recalls.

Simultaneously, instructors were pushing Washko toward a career of "painter's paintings" destined for New York City galleries. To escape others' expectations, Washko headed toward the unexpected.

"I said, 'I'm going to put my friends in drag and have them perform as my track coach and yell at me.' My first video work was about that experience, and it was kind of a breakthrough."

This act of student rebellion posed a question that Washko continues to ask: Why do things — communities, technologies, roles in life — work the way they do? And can we break the rules a little, find new ways to play?

Gameplay has long been part of Washko's life. As a teen, she enjoyed designing rooms for text-based MUD (multi-user dimension) games and eventually began playing the MMORPG World of Warcraft (WoW). Within WoW, Washko encountered the misogyny and exclusionary

vitriol that would later come to characterize Gamergate.

"It was becoming harder and harder to ignore players telling me to go back in the kitchen and make them sandwiches every time I would come forward as a cisgender woman," Washko says.

Her initial impulse was to quit the game. However, reflecting on her 'offline life' — populated by community organizers, activists and performance artists — Washko wondered if there was another way to play. Specifically, she might stay in the game, ask questions of other players and even intervene in the world they were building together. Instead of dashing her blue-green avatar (named "Ookitties") off the screen, Washko began using the character

"Awesome, funny people are creating improvisational worlds together. The structure is unknown. They're sharing space together and imagining alternatives to the systems we're governed by."

— Angela Washko

to approach other players in-game and ask questions: What do you think feminism is? What comes to mind when you hear someone is a feminist? These conversations became a series of videos, as well as live performances where an audience could witness these conversations taking place along



Angela Washko. Courtesy photo

the craggy rocks of a misty, pixelated landscape.

Although Washko's current life doesn't leave much time for immersive MMORPGs

(she's an artist, a partner, a mother and the newest Catherine B. Heller Collegiate Professor of Art at the University of Michigan's Stamps School of Art & Design), games remain central to her life.

"I'm so excited about tabletop role-playing. It's my favorite thing right now," she says.

Washko notes that what began

in the 1970s as a niche interest (at times paranoiacally associated with mythical Satanic cults) has become somewhat mainstream. "Awesome, funny people are creating improvisational worlds together. The structure is unknown. They're sharing space together and imagining alternatives to the systems we're governed by," Washko says.

Rather than working as a solo artist or directing others to enact her designs, Washko's looking to create collaborative, performance-oriented gaming opportunities. Players might try to embody

their roleplaying characters in the "real world" (even just a little). Or, maybe, the "game board" is the whole house or the whole city. Whatever the setup, Washko pursues her central questions: Why does this game work this way? Who else might be able to join and share their creativity, if we reworked the rules?

This collaborative approach is informed by Washko's successful documentary film, "Workhorse Queen," starring Mrs. Kasha

See Angela Washko, page 15



**“I HAVE A WHOLE TEAM AT VIVENT
HEALTH WHO MAKE SURE I’M HEALTHY.”**

**IF IT WEREN’T FOR THEM, I DOUBT
I WOULD BE WHERE I AM TODAY.”**

– Greg, Vivent Health patient

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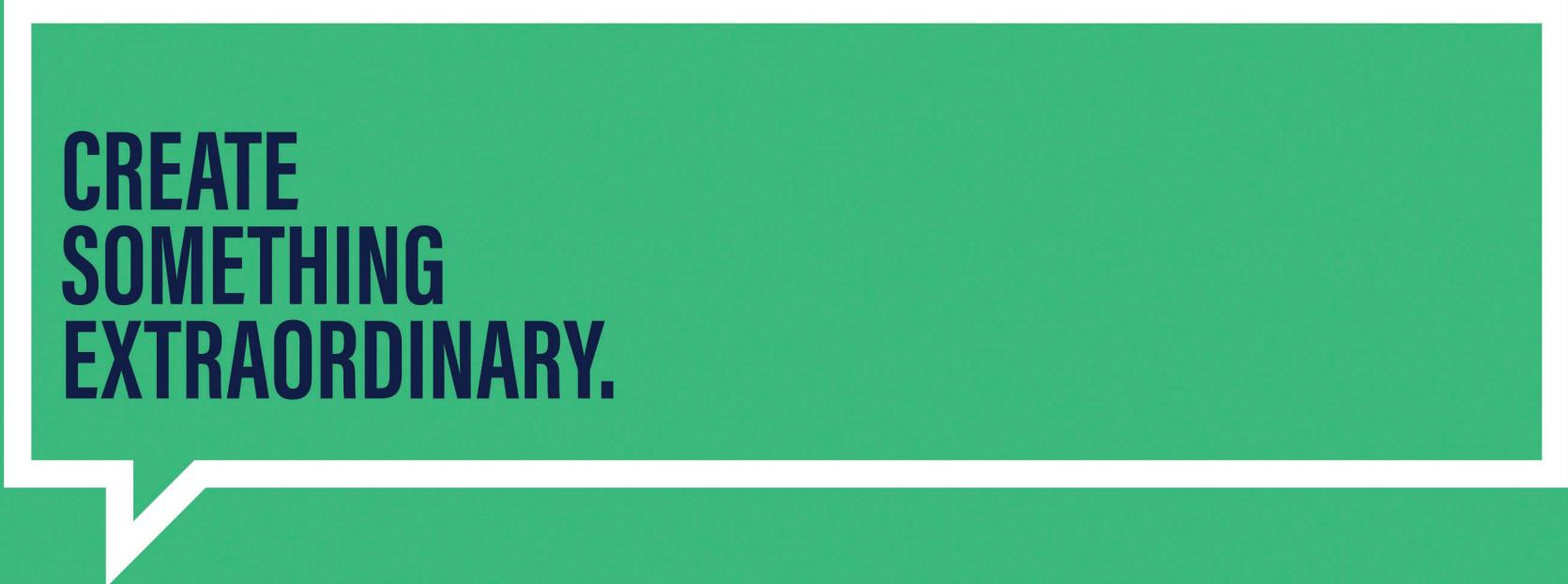


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Ron DeSantis Hopes His Freedom Summer Will Outshine Pride Month

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Greetings from sunny and fascist Florida! Yes, that's right. I'm writing this column from the least LGBTQ-friendly state in the nation. My wife, son and I are here visiting family. Do I wish that I had no family living in Florida? Why, yes. Yes, I do. Alas. Here I am in the Sunshine State during Pride Month.

Oh, excuse me. I mean "Freedom Summer," a designation created by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who decided that bridges around the state that have historically been lit up in rainbow colors will instead be lit up in red, white and blue. Way to take the word "freedom" and the colors red, white and blue and use them as a way to tell LGBTQ+ Floridians to go pound sand.

You'd think — or hope, anyway — that the horrific massacre at the 2016 Pulse nightclub in Orlando would have changed attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people in the state, but it really didn't.

In fact, over the last few years, anti-LGBTQ+ policies in Florida have changed the climate here for the worse. And by climate, I mean the social climate, though the climate-climate has also suffered! Wild that Republicans in states most impacted by extreme weather events think global warming is just some woke nonsense.

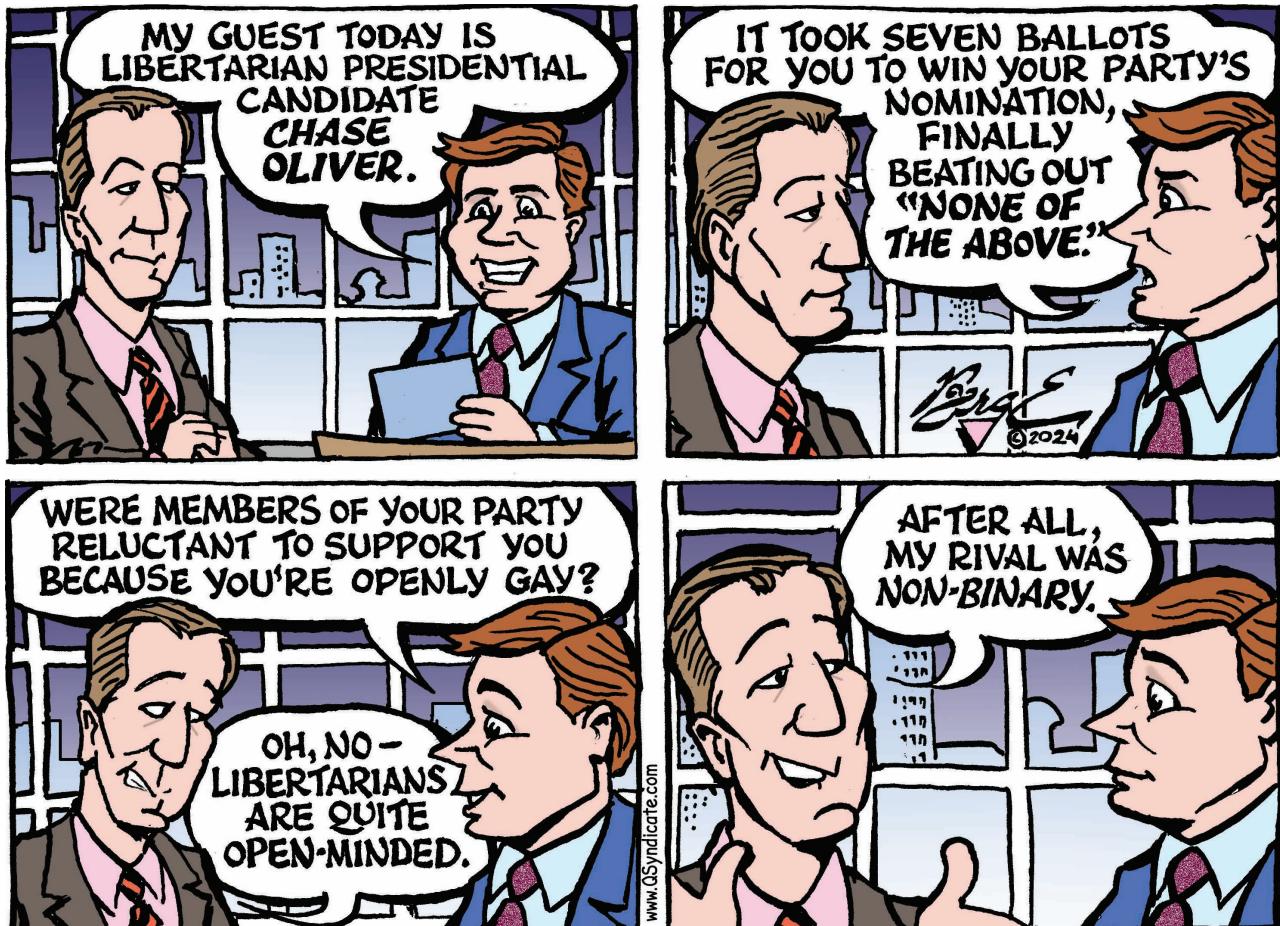
Who knows if this is actually a conscious plan by DeSantis or if he's just so destroyed by his absolutely pitiful showing in the primary that not even hurting the gays brings him joy anymore.

Karrissa T. Wade, a Jacksonville drag queen, told First Coast News that anti-LGBTQ+ legislation "has just opened the door for more and more hate."

Which is no doubt the intention.

But while DeSantis and Florida Republicans have gone out of their way to enact an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda, they haven't been entirely successful.

For example, last year, an Orlando judge stopped a ban on kids attending public drag shows.



But wait, there's more. "In March, [Equality Florida] announced a settlement with the state over key provisions of the so-called 'don't say gay' law that DeSantis rammed through the Republican-controlled state legislature in 2022," The Guardian reports. "Under the terms of that settlement, the state agreed to reinstate the rights of students and teachers to speak freely in the classroom about LGBTQ+ people, families and issues."

So there's some gay-sayin' going on in Florida after all!

DeSantis even dialed down his book-banning fervor.

In April, he signed a bill into law that "protects schools from activists trying to politicize and disrupt a [school] district's [book] review process," reports The Guardian.

You'll remember that, for a time, right-wing conservatives were

challenging hundreds of books, demanding a review process to get them removed from library shelves. Books about Black history and LGBTQ+ people were targeted. Some teachers were so afraid of getting in trouble that they removed all of the books in their classrooms.

As The Guardian puts it, even though it was DeSantis himself who was in favor of policies that effectively banned books, he declared that "some people are taking the curriculum transparency and trying to weaponize that for

political purposes."

You don't say! Gay.

When my family and I arrived at the Orlando airport I saw a Pride display at a book/souvenir store. I half expected to see DeSantis burst through the store's glass window like a fascist Kool-Aid man and topple the display.

It seems like losing bigly to convicted felon and disgraced former president Donald Trump in the Republican primary might have something to do with DeSantis cooling his anti-LGBTQ+ jets a bit.

"He wasn't pushing the more radical elements of his agenda through the state legislature in 2024 as he did one year ago because they didn't bring him the presidency," Charles Zelden, a professor of history and politics at Nova Southeastern University told The Guardian. "He is thinking about his future as a politician and what comes next after the governorship — and he seems to be trying to moderate some of his harsher stances."

Wild if true! Meanwhile, Trump hasn't moderated any of his stances and Republicans are loving it. So who knows if this is actually a conscious plan by DeSantis or if he's just so destroyed by his absolutely pitiful showing in the primary that not even hurting the gays brings him joy anymore.

Not that there hasn't been anti-LGBTQ+ legislation introduced this year. But unlike previous years, the state legislature doesn't seem to have the same appetite for harmful legislation.

"We stopped or neutralized 21 of 22 anti-LGBTQ bills this session," Jon Harris Maurer, public policy director of Equality Florida, told The Guardian. "Momentum is on our side."

I sure hope so! But I also hope that my family members in Florida get the hell out of here.

Losing Braun Court: Redevelopment Plan Announced

In a move that feels like the true end of an era, a real estate developer that has been buying up Braun Court properties for several years has announced a proposal to replace the historically queer business enclave with a 37-unit condo development.

For decades, the Kerrytown commercial courtyard served as an LGBTQ-affirming community gathering place, anchored by businesses like *Vault* bar, Common Language Bookstore and Trillium Real Estate. Local community members flocked to Pride events and organically turned

up in the courtyard when significant news events impacted the community, such as the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision that held that the Fourteenth Amendment requires states to license and recognize same-sex marriage.

Wickfield Properties has been gradually buying properties for years, and recently purchased the two final properties: The Bar at 327 Braun Court and Trillium Real Estate, which has been operated by a local married couple, founders Linda Lombardini and Sandi Smith, since 2001. Trillium will move to a new Main Street location.

Wickfield's plans call for knocking down the buildings in Braun Court and replacing them with 25 two-bedroom condos and 12 three-bedroom condos.



Rep. Laurie Pohutsky. Courtesy photo

See a Futuristic Queer Sci-Fi Play

"Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis," a queer sci-fi drama set 100 years in the future, is set to hit the Hilberry Gateway stage at Wayne State University on June 29. The play imagines a time when Detroit is the last place where humans still live on Earth and where two people embark on a quest to choreograph forgotten memories of AIDS activism after discovering that HIV produces superpowers. Visit bit.ly/4eEpWMj for tickets.

Michigan Senate Passes Bill Banning Gay and Trans 'Panic' Defenses

The Michigan Senate passed a long-awaited bill on June 20 that would officially ban the "gay panic" and "trans panic" defense in court. Michigan Rep. Laurie Pohutsky introduced House Bill 4718 more than a year ago. "At its very core, this defense asserts that the crimes against the community carry less weight because we are inherently less human and, therefore,

less valuable," Pohutsky said in a speech on the floor of the Michigan House of Representatives in 2023.

The defense has been used in courts across the country to excuse violent crimes when accused perpetrators have claimed the crimes were provoked by the victim's sexual orientation or transgender identity. High-profile cases like the murder of Matthew Shepard and the "Jenny Jones Murder" here in Michigan have centered on the defense.

Michigan's Democrat senators were joined by four Republicans in passing the bill 24-14. The bill will move back to the House for final approval and then on to Gov. Whitmer's desk.



Braun Court in 2016 at the one-year anniversary of the *Obergefell* decision. Photo: BTL archives

Black Trans Circles Convention

Black Trans Circles, an annual event produced by Transgender Law Center, will hold its next convention in Detroit on July 1 to 3, focused on Black trans women empowerment, decreasing anti-trans violence through healing justice techniques, leadership and networking.

Trans advocate Jeynce Poindexter told BTL she has been working with Transgender Law Center to bring the event to Detroit to shine a positive light on the accomplishments and potential of Black trans women. "Too often, we're at the bottom of the totem pole. We're thanked, but how often are we at the center?" she said. "This is a three-day elevated experience to love on these women, to hear their stories and to develop an understanding of how our intersections overlap." Poindexter expects around 30 attendees.

Ann Arbor Library's Big Gay Read Is Underway

Grab your copy of Samantha Irby's "We Are Never Meeting in Real Life" and get ready for the first two events in Ann Arbor District Library's month-long Big Gay Read. Irby will hold a talk, Q&A and book signing on July 7 at 6 p.m., and on July 11, a fun Irby-themed Zumba session is set for 6:30 p.m. Visit aadl.org/thebiggayread for the full list of events.

Melissa Etheridge Docuseries Set to Air

"Melissa Etheridge: I'm Not Broken," a two-party docuseries centered on the singer's work with incarcerated women battling addiction, will premiere on Paramount+ on July 9. The series follows Etheridge as she pens a new song inspired by her communication with five women prisoners incarcerated in her hometown in Topeka, Kansas. Etheridge's live album "I'm Not Broken," recorded at the correctional facility, will be released on July 12.



Melissa Etheridge. Photo: Paramount

Why the Upcoming Michigan Supreme Court Race Is Vital to the LGBTQ+ Community

BY JAY KAPLAN

If anyone doubts the importance of Michigan's Supreme Court race this November, and the massive impact it can have on our state's LGBTQ+ residents, I suggest taking a close look at some of the recent decisions the Court has handed down. Doing so will drive home the importance of this race.

Since 2022, the Michigan Supreme Court has issued favorable decisions protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people. It also issued a new court rule that ensures transgender and gender nonbinary people are afforded the same dignity and equal access to justice given to cisgender persons in Michigan courts. Here is a summary of those decisions and court rule:

- In *Rouch World v. Michigan Department of Civil Rights*, the Court held that LGBTQ+ people are covered by state civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in employment, housing, education and public accommodations. This ruling resulted in comprehensive civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ people. It also provided the momentum for the Michigan Legislature to finally add explicit discrimination protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to our civil rights laws, making Michigan the 22nd state to do so.

- Last year, the Court held in *Pueblo v. Haas* that non-biological same-sex parents, who were not married because state law had prohibited it, should now be legally recognized as a parent and that children should have the legal protections of both parents. This decision encouraged Michigan's legislature to pass comprehensive parenthood recognition legislation this year that will result in LGBTQ+ married and unmarried couples having the same presumptions of parenthood that have been afforded to heterosexual couples under Michigan family law.
- The Court also adopted a new rule that now requires all state court judges and their staff to address transgender and non-binary people,



including attorneys, by their preferred pronouns and names. Michigan is the only state to have such a court rule. This is a far cry from the Michigan Supreme Court majority in place when the ACLU of Michigan began its LGBTQ+ Project in 2001. That Court issued decisions and took actions that:

- Permitted local city governments to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people in employment.
- Interpreted Michigan's constitutional marriage amendment to not only deny same-sex couples the right to marry, but the right to form civil unions and the right to be recognized as domestic partners.
- Denied any form of parental recognition to non-biological parents if they were unmarried, undermining the stability of LGBTQ+ families and legal protections

for their children.

- Actively prevented same-sex couples from jointly adopting their children through second parent adoption.

So yes, it is crucial to vote the entire ballot in November to keep protecting, and expanding, the rights of LGBTQ+ people. That includes the state Supreme Court candidates listed under the nonpartisan section of your ballot. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to make sure that those votes are well-informed.

Paying close attention to positions held by state Supreme Court candidates is particularly significant now because of the current landscape of the federal judiciary and the U.S. Supreme Court. Proponents of LGBTQ+ rights nationwide are increasingly looking to state courts to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, and to afford LGBTQ+ relationships and families the same recognitions and protections afforded

to heterosexuals.

You can learn about the candidates and their positions in the Bridge Michigan article, "Who's running for Michigan Supreme Court in 2024?" at bridgemi.com. By being an educated voter and casting a ballot for the candidates who share your values, you will further the ongoing effort to make our state a better place, not just for LGBTQ+ people, but for all Michiganders.

Jay Kaplan is staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's Nancy Katz & Margo Dichtelmiller LGBTQ+ Rights Project.

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**LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ARE ON THE
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The Humble Hippopotamus: Michigan's Next Pride Symbol?

The HRP reshaped local laws, including pioneering decriminalization efforts and landmark non-discrimination ordinances ahead of their time

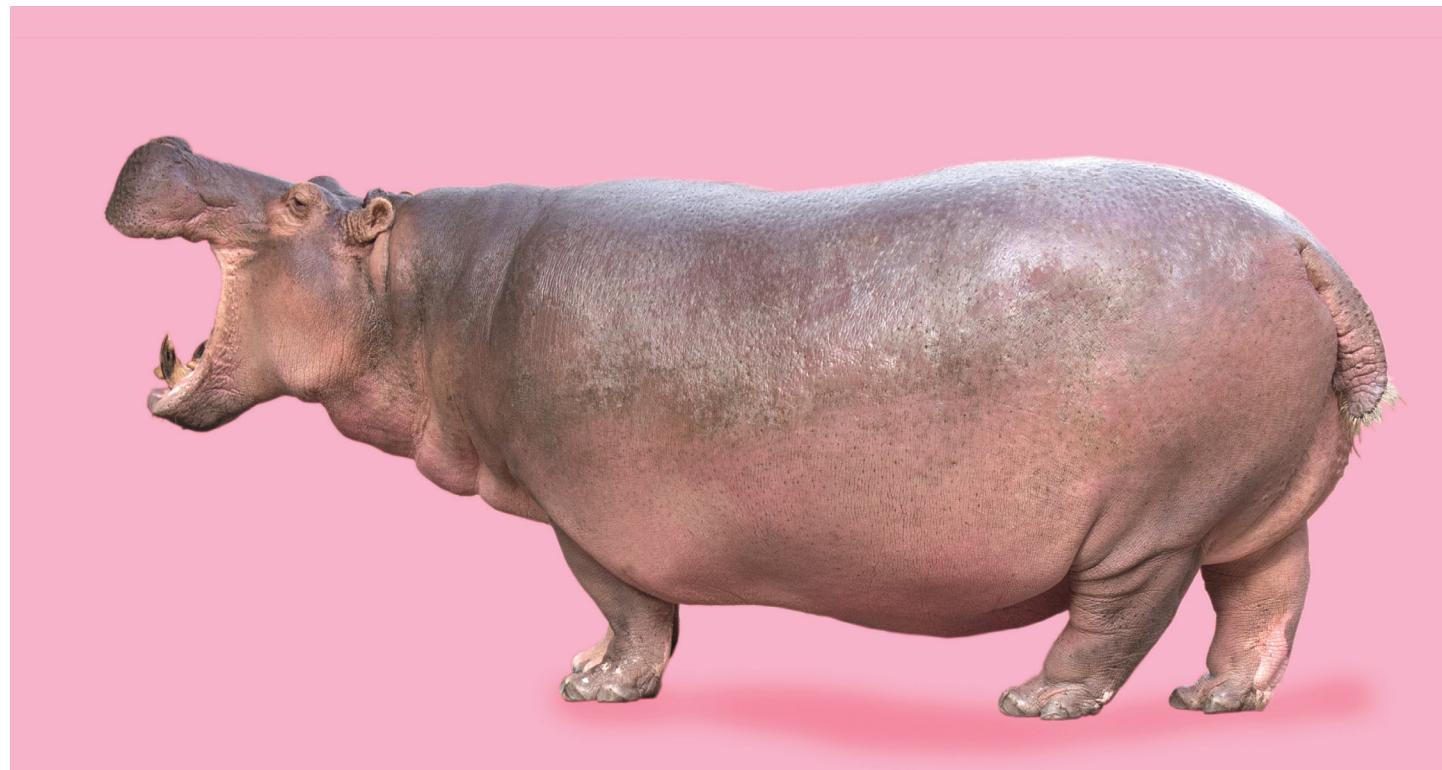
BY HANK KENNEDY

The animals that represent American political parties are quite the menagerie. Most people know about the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant, but what about the Libertarian porcupine? The Constitution Party eagle? The very fitting Prohibition Party camel? In Michigan, we were graced with a unique political party animal mascot, the hippopotamus of the Ann Arbor- and Ypsilanti-based Human Rights Party.

Third parties have acquired a reputation of being “spoilers” for the two major parties. Yet, third parties provide an important function. Often, they raise issues that the two major parties are too timid to broach themselves. The first political parties to oppose the spread of slavery were the Liberty Party and the more moderate Free Soil Party (namesake of Michigan’s Free Soil Township), not the established Democrats and Whigs. The Prohibition Party created a constituency that led to the 19th Amendment and the “noble experiment” of banning alcohol. Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal borrowed many of the reforms, like Social Security, a minimum wage and protecting collective bargaining rights from Norman Thomas’ Socialist Party. Thomas, however, maintained that Roosevelt carried out the socialist program out “on a stretcher.”

The Human Rights Party (HRP) can be counted with this group. The HRP managed to elect several members to the city councils of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti between 1972 and 1976. Its elected officials enacted prescient reforms that would become law state-wide in decades hence. HRP membership was composed of disaffected Democrats and independent socialists, but by far the largest cohort was student radicals at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University. Although considered a product of student radicalism, the HRP also sought out support from organized labor, the poor and racial minorities. They showed up to picket lines during strikes and made connections to the UAW and Teamsters.

When two HRP candidates were elected to Ann Arbor City Council in 1972, they held the balance of power between the Democrats and Republicans. Using their leverage, the HRP passed legislation decriminalizing marijuana,



changing possession of the drug from a felony to a misdemeanor worthy of a \$5 fine. This harm-reduction legislation was a compromise between HRP councilors and the Democrats but it served as a model; similar laws were passed in Ypsilanti and East Lansing. It took until 2018 for marijuana to become legal statewide. The HRP platform called for an end to anti-abortion laws, even before the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade Decision and way before the 2022 passage of Proposal 3 that guaranteed reproductive freedom in Michigan. The hippos of the HRP were leading the way back in the 1970s.

Aside from fighting for the decriminalization of marijuana, HRP members of Ann Arbor’s city council passed the first non-discrimination ordinance in the state. This ordinance was amended to include sexual orientation as a protected category, another first. The HRP’s two elected officials in Ann Arbor made history in yet another way: When Jerry Degriek and Nancy Weschler came out as gay in 1973, they became the first openly gay elected officials in America. In 1974, HRPer Kathy Kozachenko, elected to Ann Arbor as an open lesbian, became the first openly gay person elected to

public office in this country, four years before Harvey Milk’s election in San Francisco. In her acceptance speech, Kozachenko said that her campaign forced people “to reexamine their prejudices and stereotypes.”

Zoltan Ferency, the party’s candidate for governor in 1974, was less successful, as was his 1994 attempt to pass a ballot initiative requiring a unicameral legislature. Although, given the progress of some other HRP initiatives... The HRP nominee for Ann Arbor school board likewise failed to be elected, though there were some extenuating circumstances. She was a 15-year-old member of Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor named Sonia Yaco, running as a write-in candidate. Still, she received 1,363 votes, about eight percent of the total.

Although some of the issues pushed by the HRP today are the law of the land, others, such as calling for a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and community control of the police, were considerably more controversial. During the party’s heyday, not everyone was happy about the success of the HRP hippos. The now-defunct “Red Squads” of the Michigan State Police and the Detroit Police Department kept files on the group

as potentially dangerous or even subversive. Regina McNulty, who ran for lieutenant governor with Ferency in 1974, kept her police records with pride. She maintained that the police were “the only ones who kept track of all the cool things [she] did.”

Although the HRP pushed for important reforms and fought for tenants, workers and students in the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area, the party did not survive the ebb in student activism in the late 1970s. By 1977, it ceased to exist as an independent entity and merged into the Socialist Party of Michigan. Still, electing committed radicals to office was a victory in and of itself, and the HRP left behind a legacy of reforms to be proud of. Looking back on her council career, Nancy Weschler said she “wanted to raise a little hell.” She, Degriek and Kozachenko certainly did.

So this Pride, Michiganders should add the humble hippopotamus to all the other vaunted symbols of queer liberation. Perhaps some enterprising soul will put the hippo on a rainbow flag, alongside a pot leaf and a peace sign, in memory of the late Human Rights Party. I’d certainly fly it.

Davis. "Workhorse Queen" follows "MKD" in her day-to-day as she navigates dizzying professional success and painful relationship changes post-*"RuPaul's Drag Race."* Although Washko originally envisioned "Workhorse Queen" as a solo project, she quickly realized the project would benefit from the talents and expertise of friends and collaborators. After winning awards at several film festivals, "Workhorse Queen" became available for viewing on the STARZ network, as well as major streaming platforms.

For all its intense moments, the film produces far less anxiety than Washko's 2018 project, "The Game: The Game" ("TG:TG"). In "TG:TG," the player is the target of pickup artists' cheesy, creepy and menacing attempts to get laid. Washko carefully studied materials from the pickup artist scene, including books, conference recordings and social media content and developed a disturbingly realistic set of pseudo-seductive encounters. Her project eventually drew the attention of Roosh V, one of the more infamous internet pickup sages.

Dedicated to having a conversation rather than a monologue, Washko interviewed



Washko's "Mother, Player" installation. Courtesy photo

Roosh over Skype in 2015. Watching their conversation, it's painful to see Roosh's ongoing dismissal of women's thoughts — even when a woman, in this case Washko, is going out of her way to explore his ideas, person-to-person. "TG: TG," and other works emerging from Washko's research, reveal the disturbing mechanics of sex-turned-misogynistic-game.

In recent years, Washko's attention has

shifted away from the hows and whys of pickup culture toward stories like that of Mrs. Kasha Davis and an ongoing, major story in her own life: motherhood. "Mother, Player" is an "experimental narrative video game featuring pregnancy and early parenthood stories from artists during the global pandemic." Navigating internal and external worlds, the player explores a realm usually ignored by video game designers.

Perhaps it's Washko's way of rephrasing familiar questions: How does motherhood work? Can it work differently? Here, the questions sound intensely personal and ever-timely.

Even if motherhood, pickup artists and the art world present intense challenges, Washko is committed to the long play and is looking forward to her new role at Stamps.

"Being in this research university context, there's structural support to work in an interdisciplinary way that's sustainable," she says. "And I really appreciate that at Michigan, there's infrastructure to support research and culture-making collaborations with students."

Outside the university, Washko hopes to find kindred spirits around town.

With a full professorial / parental schedule, it's likely you'll see Washko zooming around town on her bike en route to a meeting or play date. In between all those responsibilities, though, you might run into her at a performance, a show opening or sitting down to roll the dice.

"I want to know where the experimental, inclusive tabletop roleplaying communities are," she says. "I'm also interested in the performance scene and creating dialogues between the university and the broader performance community."

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Puzzle can be found on page 25

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Five Tips for Navigating (Yet Another) Stressful Presidential Election Cycle

Create a plan now for a better November later

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It's hard to believe that at one point in my adult life, I relished a presidential election year. In the months leading up to November, you'd find me poring over polls and bantering with my favorite Eastern Michigan political science professor on Facebook — all part of a ritual that mirrored how other people might anticipate the Oscars or the Super Bowl.

Politicians might not have the star quality of Oscar-nominated actors, but the spectacle similarly attracted me — just swap the celebs with plunging necklines and "It Girl" energy for politicos wearing smart, butch pantsuits. I loved enveloping myself in a universe narrated by Rachel Maddow and Maureen Dowd and deeply studying every single voter poll Nate Silver ever conducted. The wild, weird world of the U.S. election system and figuring out what makes voters tick is why I got a degree in political science. Because no matter what happened, we were witnessing democracy in action. Everybody got a say, and even though lots of people held different worldviews, even 10 years ago, I felt sure this country was headed toward an era where some things — like queer rights — were settled issues.

But then... well, we all know what happened. This publication frequently focuses on the aftermath of what's happened, and what's happening still, in every single issue. Forced to take up a defensive posture in the face of relentless, senseless attacks from the far right, we're reckoning with a political environment that not even Jon Stewart can manage to make funny anymore.

Here's the thing, though. Politics isn't going away, and as much as the queer community needs you to do the right thing at the voting booth (and beyond), you deserve a break from the madness. We all do. Here are five ways you can navigate a healthy, centered path through another fraught election season.

1. Stop. Doomsscrolling.

I know, I know. For many of us, it's reflexive. It can feel like if you don't keep up, you'll never catch up, and if you don't catch up, you'll have no chance to stop the speeding freight train before it reaches your doorstep. Just me? In any case, this is a nonsensical notion, of course. Stuff's going to happen whether you read about it or not.

So, clean up those feeds. Limit your news intake to a designated amount of time each day or week and then, stick to your limit. Unfollow news outlets that publish depressing story after depressing story, and especially the ones generating headlines engineered for outrage. Instead, follow the seemingly inconsequential things that make your heart happy, whether it's Instagram girls drinking boba tea and waxing poetic or the kind of classic feline content that built this internet world we all rely on. Same goes with toxic, politically frustrated friends who are just freaking you out every single day (even if it's me — I'll understand).

2. Do something kind for others.

Instead of reflecting your justifiably angry energy right back at right-wingers hellbent on taking away your legal rights and protections, channel it toward a good cause. You'll feel better, according to science. The Mental Health Foundation reports that helping others helps you in several ways:

- It creates a sense of belonging and reduces isolation
- It helps to keep things in perspective, including your own circumstances
- It can improve your self-esteem
- Acts of kindness also contribute to making the world an overall happier place, as evidenced by a 2015 study published in the



Journal of Positive Psychology. The study revealed that a "pay it forward" style of kindness encourages others to repeat the good deeds they've experienced themselves. The acts don't even need to be particularly grand — small deeds like complimenting your neighbor's yardwork can kick off a chain of kindness strong enough to ward off the effects of stress-inducing political rhetoric.

Queer-centered non-profits all over Michigan welcome your help — check out orgs like Ruth Ellis Center, Affirmations, LGBT Detroit, Stand with Trans, Equality Michigan and Transgender Michigan.

3. Do something kind for yourself.

Self-love is all the rage on TikTok, and it turns out, the kids are onto something. The concept of self-love is one of those ideas that gets a big ol' eyeroll from the brand of right-winger that thinks your "safe space" is stupid, but in fact, it takes a lot of inner strength to nurture the greatest love story you'll ever write — the one you create with yourself. Self-

love means accepting yourself fully, treating yourself kindly and with respect and pouring into your own growth and well-being. It definitely means letting external negativity pass right by you.

Think this sounds like a bunch of psychobabble nonsense or some kind of Swiftie parable for the 2020s? Nope. Again, smart people have studied the concept of self-love — a lot of them. Hundreds of research studies have linked self-compassion to reduced psychopathy and improved well-being. BetterUp reports that self-love is linked to a host of positive benefits that can help you weather the election year storm, from lowered stress to higher levels of resilience to building a stronger sense of empathy.

4. Set it and forget it.

For many people, election year stress comes down to a spiraling feeling of dread about what-ifs and unknowns, and it's true — we can't know what will happen until it happens, no matter how obsessive we are about the latest Washington

Post poll. But there are some things in our control, and taking charge of those things can put you on the path toward better mental health:

- Research your ballot at vote411.org — study up on candidates and issues unfamiliar to you
- Make a plan for voting — if you're voting by mail, request an absentee ballot as soon as they are available
- Set a political donation budget and stick to it
- Encourage a few friends and family to vote and put up a yard sign or two
- If you're so inclined, sign up for a few specific campaign volunteer opportunities or register to be a poll worker on Election Day

Remember, all politics are local. While it's important to stay informed and engaged, it's the people closest to you who matter most. So, lean into their love and lean on each other as we all brace for the impending storm. When the dust settles and we've taken good care of ourselves along the way, we'll be ready to lead one other through whatever is on the other side.

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1 Queer Summer Camp

Continued from page 6

are. What I love about the promise of Unirondack is that they acknowledge that all teenagers (all people for that matter) are different, and the best we can do is accept and embrace that.

Unirondack camper Kai Reynolds considers the camp a home away from home. Reynolds and his family have attended camp for many years, volunteering to help get the grounds ready for incoming campers and cleaning up when the summer is through. "The thing that is so different about Camp Unirondack from other spaces such as school or other camps is that it creates an environment where everyone can come together and laugh, learn, converse and really just be as they are inside and out, without having to worry about being judged as they are," Reynolds tells BTL. "It's love, peace, creativity and comfort. When I'm there, I feel I can be the most genuine and present version of myself. I've learned more at Unirondack than I could ever learn from all my years at school."

Unirondack puts an emphasis on campers' autonomy, allowing campers, themselves, to govern what their time there looks like. Reynolds credits Unirondack's inclusive environment to a dedicated team of staffers. "No one feels less than another," they say. "The staff gives us the best experience possible at a time when it can be so hard to feel content with the person we are, surrounded by stigmas and hate. At Unirondack, all those things that make us different are embraced. Sometimes we need a reminder that we are all just



Arts and crafts at Camp Unirondack. Photo: Shannon Konek

people, one way or another, and Unirondack is that reminder."

Here in Michigan, LGBTQ+ youth and LGBTQ+ families find sanctuary at Camp4All in Michigan and Ohio each summer. Founder David Yuhaus tells BTL that even campers who aren't out enthusiasts say they value their time at the camp, which features a classic experience with rustic cabins and a woodsy environment. "I hear all the time about how families are looking for someplace safe for their kids," Yuhaus says. "So many are looking for connections to carry with them into the school year and for people who are going through the same things that they are."

Yuhaus says some families that come to Camp4All have tried out traditional summer camps with mixed success. "The biggest thing we see, though, is the number of trans campers — 50 percent or more of our campers

are trans and the majority are just not comfortable in a traditional setting." At Camp4All, the cabins and bathhouses are non-gendered and organized by age.

Yuhaus says about 80% of campers return to Camp4All and almost all who don't return have aged out of the programs. He shared some feedback from previous campers. "Camp4All gave me a safe place to just be myself," wrote one camper. "Everything there is so nice and fun and just in general welcoming. And it gives me something incredible to look forward to next year."

Another camper wrote, "It gave me a place where I could truly let go of everyone's standards and just fully be myself. I've never had a place where I could be that before — it's amazing. I don't need to censor my thoughts, personality or mask my neurodivergence."

The promise of any camp is time away from parents. You can be a

teenager who has secure attachments to your parents and still benefit from that time and space away to let new ideas grow and nurture new parts of yourself. This can be a tough pill for many parents to swallow. You haven't done anything wrong if your child enjoys four weeks without you. Let there be a few weeks where you relinquish all control over what they're doing and talking about.

Camp Out Family Camp, located in Southwest Michigan, offers a family camp experience for families who identify with any LGBTQ+ identity. Though I believe all families would benefit from the joys and challenges that camp holds, I am moved to think of the experience queer families

could get to share with other families that look like them, given that there are rarely established communities of queer parents and families out in the world.

Do we need a higher number of expressly queer camps? Or should efforts be placed in improving how "regular" camps handle queerness? I'm not sure at this juncture, but after my summer in Michigan, I knew that something had to shift.

I was heartened this year to see that the camp I worked at opened a poll to let campers and



A group of campers at Camp4All. Courtesy photo

parents choose the new names of the previously labeled "Boys Side" and "Girls Side." The steps we take toward progress can be as simple as this.

I don't believe queer summer camps are for every queer teenager, and with some luck, they won't be the sort of thing we feel necessary in the coming generations. But I know what the programs being launched these days would have meant to me and the boys in my cabin.

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'I Am Pride'

Tituss Burgess on performing with the DSO for its inaugural Pride concert



Tituss Burgess. Photo: Jeff Mills Photography

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

When actor and singer Tituss Burgess takes the stage with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, it won't just be the DSO's first official Pride concert — it will also be the high tenor's first-ever time in Detroit. Even Burgess, an Athens, Georgia native, is surprised he's never been to the Motor City. "Parts of my cultural card should be retracted, that's for sure," he joked with BTL recently.

In many ways, he's been everywhere, though. Burgess could be seen right in your home while portraying Titus Andromedon on the Netflix series "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt." Live performance, though, has long been the foundation of his career. Burgess gained recognition for his work on Broadway, appearing in notable productions such as his debut in "Good Vibrations," "Jersey Boys" and "The Little Mermaid," as Sebastian the Crab, a role he originated.

For his Pride show at 8 p.m. on June 29 with the DSO, which will feature Principal Pops Conductor Designate Enrico Lopez-Yáñez, Burgess will celebrate icons from film and Broadway and perform songs from "Porgy and Bess," "Jekyll & Hyde," "Beauty and the Beast" and more.

Burgess recently spoke about how a racist experience at his first Pride reshaped how he thinks about the month-long celebration, what was particularly special to him about his role on "Kimmy Schmidt" and which famous Disney villain he may slip into during his Detroit performance.

How are you feeling about your upcoming performance with the DSO?

I'm so excited. It's such an esteemed orchestra, and of course, Enrico Lopez-Yáñez is taking over all the Pops across America, so getting on his roster was exciting. We worked together about two years ago and just hit it off.

And he speaks very highly of the Detroit Symphony, so I'm eager to hear what their nuances will be on some of these sharks. I'll be offering some Shirley Bassey, Bette Midler and Lena Horne, a few other crooners in there that I dusted off and some songs that people don't visit very often anymore.

How did the interaction two years ago lead to this DSO performance? Was that instrumental in getting you here?

That's not quite how that works, but sort of. It was instrumental in me wanting to work with him again, that's for sure. Enrico is such a wonderful musician and conductor. It's all about the music and that, for me, sealed the deal, and so I'm eager to be under his baton again.

How do you decide on the repertoire?

I know I'm being asked to come offer a concert. Obviously, there's the occasion and what would be right thematically, but I pulled from what I'm experiencing at the moment in my life so that I don't get up on stage and lie. And I start there and try and weave in what I feel audiences obviously will want to hear, but offer up things that they wouldn't think to expect at a Pops concert, and it sort of goes from there. And I swap things in and out as we get closer to the show, but it's really sort of me intuiting my way through it.

In what other ways will this performance showcase Pride and what it means to you?

Well, I am the intersection of many things. I'm Black, I'm gay, I'm culturally Christian, I'm underrepresented. There's not a lot of representation out there for queer men of color. And so my very presence on stage is walking activism. I know people will come because they want to see Titus Andromedon or any of the other characters that I've played. But where I hover and where my musicianship starts is at the truth and at the truth of what's going on in America, what's going on in my life and what's going on in my community, and that is the energy I bring with me on stage. So audiences will get what they want, but they'll also get a glimpse into how to think outside themselves.

Given the climate for LGBTQ+ people in the country right now, how do you feel about being an out gay Black man in 2024?

I notice a greater deficit in my community as far as representation is concerned, as far as mental health access is concerned. Because of the lack of it in our communities, it has affected the way my community responds to one another and the way we dream.

I feel like now more than ever, knowing what I know in my mid-40s, there's certain role models and certain imaging that I wish I had access to so that I knew what was possible for me as a gay Black man. And it is hard to dream of something with no past points of reference. How do you even put those puzzle pieces together? And while I want to be no one's role model, what I will do is put myself on full display — the good, the bad and the ugly — to at least give someone a template.

What does it feel like to know that fans do see you as a role model?

It's overwhelming. I'm certainly still figuring myself out and working through my stuff as a man of color. But what I acknowledge is that if they were not coming up to me saying something, then I don't think I would be doing it right.

So when someone feels compelled to acknowledge my modest contribution in that way, I just stand there and listen. People teach you how to treat them, and they clue you in on what is working if you just shut up and listen. And I just take notes, and these are the spaces where it seems I'm being most effective. Not to over-legitimize my presence in the world, but I do take what I do seriously in terms of art, and I'm cognizant of how it's consumed and how it is viewed and what I may or may not represent for the culture.

This is the first official Pride concert by the DSO. I'm wondering what your very first Pride experience was.

Oh, it was awful. The soundbite you'll get from this is not fun. I'll see if I can spin it for you.

Feel free to be honest.

Well, it was New York Pride and it was 20-some-odd years ago, and it was full of white people, and particularly white gay men who did not see me, who continued to not be able to see me. And while I don't need the gaze of another culture to legitimize me, I'm gobsmacked at how our community can be separated — segregated, even. How our lived-in experiences, while so varied, should make us race to the other to soften the blow. So ever since then, once I went in pursuit of my own cultural Pride experience thereafter, I paid more attention to my chosen family, tried to build community through my art and bring Pride to Pride as opposed to waiting for Pride to happen to me.

I'm sorry that you had that experience. Have you had better experiences at Pride recently?

Sure. I am Pride. I no longer need what I thought I needed. In fact, they need me and they need this type of candor and brutal honesty and all the parts of me: the broken spaces, the broken places, the whole places.

Regarding your role in "Kimmy Schmidt," there was something so special about Titus' relationship with Mikey. Looking back, how did it feel to be part of depicting that relationship?

While it was exaggerated and often over the top, what was honest about it was how imperfect it was. If you really look at it, [it's]

See **Tituss Burgess**, page 24



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Dr. Leo Moore Is More Than The ‘Ultimate Health Guy’

As one of the nation’s top leaders battling HIV and its stigma, this L.A. doctor embodies the best



Dr. Leo Moore. Photo: Arturo Olmos for Men's Health

BY DESIRÉE GUERRERO

Born in Mobile, Alabama, and raised in Atlanta, Dr. Leo Moore says he's "a Southerner through and through." Then, a decade ago, he relocated to Los Angeles. "Apparently, once you've lived in L.A. for at least five to 10 years, you can consider yourself an 'Angeleno' — so I guess that makes me a 'Southern Angeleno,'" he adds with a laugh.

Dr. Moore says his passion for health and medicine came early. "I wanted to become a doctor since I was 5 years old," he says. "I come from a family of servant leaders — nurses and ministers. I decided early on that I wanted to become the first doctor in our family in order to be able to serve both my family and community."

At age 25, Moore's goal became a reality. "I went to medical school at Morehouse School of Medicine, completed Internal Medicine-Primary Care residency at Yale University School of Medicine, and then completed the Robert Wood Johnson Clinic Scholars Program, a fellowship in community research and health policy, at UCLA."

After completing the fellowship, he began working in public health and has continued in this field for the past eight years.

"In my current role, as a medical director for clinic services at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, I oversee multiple clinics focused on sexual health, tuberculosis, and refugee health," Moore explains. "As I encounter many people who have developed unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as poor diet and lack of exercise, I recently completed a board certification in lifestyle medicine to help my patients and community adopt more healthy habits and prevent or reverse

chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure."

Dr. Moore has become known as a leading specialist in HIV and STI prevention and was named 2024's Ultimate Men's Health Guy by Men's Health magazine. Moore shared much of his personal journey in the feature, including a life-changing medical event that occurred in January of 2023. During a routine surgery, Moore's heart stopped beating. After he was resuscitated, he says he woke with a renewed sense of purpose.

In his current role, Moore is working harder than ever to end the stigma associated with HIV and is always emphasizing the importance of testing and treatment.

"We cannot end the HIV epidemic once and for all without ending HIV stigma," Moore says. "HIV stigma affects every aspect of care, from a person's decision to get tested, to starting PrEP, or starting HIV treatment when newly diagnosed. Additional effort is needed in regards to educating people at all levels about HIV — and also ensuring that lawmakers, attorney generals, and others involved in establishing laws and policies are aware of the advances in HIV testing, treatment and prevention so that we can end HIV criminalization in this country. Without ending HIV stigma as well as eliminating other inequities, we run the risk of only ending the HIV epidemic for the majority and leaving the marginalized communities behind."

To de-stress and stay happy and healthy in his own life, Dr. Moore says he enjoys lifting weights and listening to music after work. "It

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• Tituss Burgess

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how unchecked trauma governs your later years. Titus Andromedon was closeted well into his 30s, I believe, before he moved from Mississippi, which I think gave way to the Titus Andromedon that we saw on TV. And it also created a culture of "me, I'm first"; that character became a bit of a hoarder, if you will, of moments. And I think that inevitably contributed to his inability to connect to Mikey the way that Mikey, I believe, was ready to connect with Titus Andromedon. And so it presented a very wobbly dating life. I'm just out of a 10-year relationship, but I have no idea what dating looks like or how to do it. It's very uncomfortable. Even when it goes great, it is still a very wobbly thing. You're in a very vulnerable state. And I think it just allowed these two men on that show to present the "I don't know how to do this" of it all. And that's what won me.

Would you be interested in returning to the character for a "Kimmy Schmidt" reboot?

Trust me, you want more from me than you think I have to offer.

What do you mean by that?

It means you want me to do other things. That's my answer.

What is it about "The Preacher's Wife" that's been so worth spending the last 15 years getting it from screen to stage?

I wish I could tell you. Sometimes your art arrests you, and then sometimes you choose to be obsessed with a thing. And this thing chose me. I knew that it would be an opportunity to put faith on stage in a way that is outside of religion. And to me, that is so important. I experience God. I have a great spiritual relationship with

source and energy. And there's not just one way to know a power that is both outside of you and inside of you. And I think a lot of us are walking around feeling powerless because we are not connected to, what's the word? Our deities. And anytime I can lure the world back to the truth of who I think we are and how great we can be, and to create space for another energy to take over and be present and not be polarizing, I will do it. And here we are 15 years later, and our show was the largest grossing box office in the history of the Alliance Theater [in Georgia].

Then there's your role as Sebastian in "The Little Mermaid" on Broadway. You had talked about really wanting to play Ursula.

Yes. You might get a little taste of that in the show.

Are we getting a little taste of Ursula?

A little taste.

I'm glad you're doing Ursula on stage since producers didn't let you audition for her. But after you sang "Poor Unfortunate Souls" at one of your shows, it became an internet sensation, with two million views on YouTube. What are some other roles that you felt that you weren't allowed to play due to gender?

Fosca in "Passion." I have a concept that I think would work. So I'm trying to get that together. And then I love the role of Molina in "Kiss of the Spider Woman," but that's written for a person of Spanish descent and I wouldn't want to do to that culture what other cultures do to us. So I'll stay clear of that role. But there are so many things I would like to get to do that I can only do really in concert. Although I will play Ursula on stage, you mark my words.

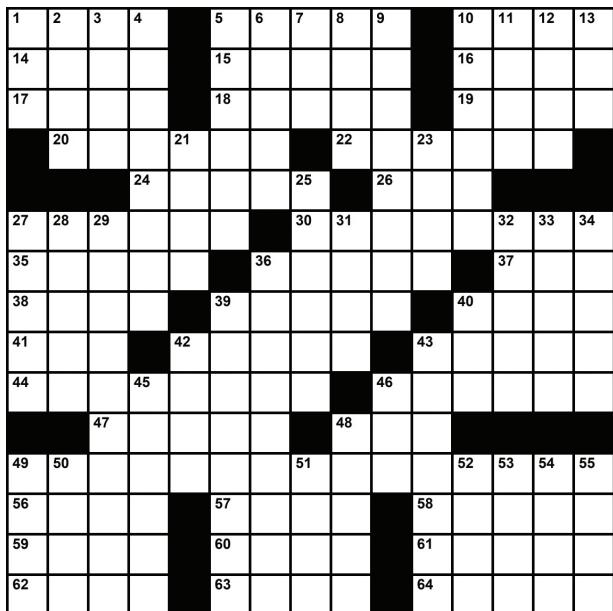
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Across

Look at Me, I'm MTG

1 Ironically straight singer Marvin
5 Generosity's opposite
10 Irene of "Fame"
14 Shaft output
15 Bea Arthur's TV maid Esther

16 Mapa of "Switched at Birth"
17 Frat hazing sounds
18 "This ____ my fault!"
19 Stew in one's own juices
20 Start of MTG's self-description in Rainbow's "Look at Me, I'm MTG"
22 More of the quote
24 Bear and Berra
26 Kilmer of "Batman Forever"
27 Cicero's birthplace
30 Bygone subcompact
35 More of the quote
36 Full of suds

Down

1 Seaman, slangily
2 Gaza Stripper, e.g.
3 Linda Hunt's "The ____ of Living Dangerously"
4 Francis Bacon, for one
5 Yankee, in Frida's land
6 Martini's partner in vermouth
7 She, in Rio
8 "Enchanted" Disney girl
9 Result of breeder sex
10 Dancer Irene
11 He or she with a degree

See p. 15 for answers

37 Satisfied cries, perhaps
38 Seaman's unit of speed
39 Songwriter Rainbow
40 Do a nocturnal activity
41 And so forth
42 In doubt
43 "The L Word" creator Chaiken
44 Some male deer
45 More of the quote
47 Tops of arenas
48 Eighths of a gal. of milk
49 End of the quote
56 Alpert of "Mame" fame
57 Prefix that means "queer"
58 Intercourse while surfing?
59 Nonheterosexual conception
60 Drag queen's application
61 Concerning one's coming out?
62 Tending to stick in one's proboscis
63 Big name in pumps
64 Main melody in a musical

12 Trust in, with "on"
13 Comics outburst
21 Skye of "Say Anything"
23 Village People's "In the ____"
25 Snippets from a Cukor film
27 "Pussy, King of the Pirates" author Kathy
28 Approach in a hurry
29 Operations
31 Lamarr of Hollywood
32 She hoped Gibson was gay in "What Women Want"
33 Use your head
34 Cosmetics name
36 Bottoms
39 Samurai drink
40 Wing for Julia Morgan
42 "What a ____!" (Bette Davis)
43 "That really wore me out"
45 Former name of Mumbai
46 "Let's call ____ day"
48 Mapplethorpe work
49 Watered down
50 What "let" means to Mauresmo
51 Butch lesbian accessories
52 Colorado neighbor
53 Log Cabin does this to candidates
54 "The King and I" setting
55 Woods of "Legally Blonde"

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Dr. Leo Moore
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helps me decompress from the day. When the weather is nice, I also love to go for hikes in the mountains. I also enjoy reading some evenings or catching up on a TV show."

If you're feeling inspired to make some new healthy habits, visit his Facebook group — Dr. Leo Moore's Fit150 Community. "The term 'Fit150' comes from research that has shown that completing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio, like brisk walking, and two resistance training workouts per week has been associated with better weight management and decreased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, depression and anxiety. Everyone is welcome, so join us!"

He's also starting a new Instagram Live series called Longevity with Dr. Leo, where he'll discuss topics with colleagues "to help

people living longer, healthier lives." Follow him on Instagram @drleomoore.

“We cannot end the HIV epidemic once and for all without ending HIV stigma. ”

— Dr. Leo Moore

Desirée Guerrero is editor of Plus Magazine. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit their websites for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.

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